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The White Cat



Lisa simply could not sit still. She fidgeted; she wandered about the room; she went to the window to look out on the last of autumn and returned to sit abruptly, her eyes imploring on her sister-in-law.

"Do stay," she said. "Don't go."

"I must," said Ruth, smiling sadly. Her hands lay tranquil on her lap. She wore her hat, her gloves and handbag near, coat and suitcase waiting in the hall—already partly gone, thought Lisa, that much gone away from me.

"What will I do without you?" asked Lisa glancing rapidly around the room, taking nothing in. "Who can I talk to?"

"You've many friends," said Ruth, nodding at her.

Lisa rose impatiently and went again to the window. Only the last of leaves were left, thinned till they were almost countable, like coins caught in the fingers of the trees.

"They're no good to me now. They won't let me talk. Now they tell me to think of the future, while I'm still not old. I must think of Will. I must do this, do that. They simply shut me up. I tell you," she said excitedly, "sometimes I have the strangest feeling that they are all in a plot against me, trying to pretend I never had a son. They pretend there was never anyone called Richard."

She began to cry. "Even Will," she said. "The very day after . . . the very day after, he took every single thing

out of the boy's room, all the things they'd made together, a few minutes here and there, ever since he came back from the war. He just cleared everything away, out, just blotted Richard out. Go through this house now and you wouldn't know there's been a boy in it."

She began to walk rapidly about the room, throwing out her hands, stopping dramatically to make a point. Her cheeks were still damp from tears. "That Stuart boy has his baseball bat, that boy who has eyes too close together, sly, I see him playing with it every time I pass. It's heartless."

Against the window she paused, shaking the haze from her eyes with a quick movement of her head that swung the still dark hair away from the still smooth face. "There's that cat," she said.

Across the street the glass of the door had given a movement of reflection as it opened and the lordly white cat came forth. It stood with its gaze faraway but its ears were erect and ready. The great tail slowly swung, feeling the air, then rose slowly upright, the back arching, the claws digging in, the whole body stretching sensuously. As softly its muscles flowed back into place, and it was cat again. For a second or two its indifferent eyes seemed to meet hers, then passed, and the great white cat turned and sauntered down the path.

"They've washed all the windows this week," said Lisa, pressing her face against her own window like a child, "washed and polished them, and they've done the curtains, and had the carpets out. I saw the florist's truck this morning. They must be having a party. Don't you think it means they're having a party?"

"I should think it does."

"I think it was very queer that they didn't do anything when . . . you know, two months ago. Not a single little card, not anything."

"You hardly know them, Lisa. Be reasonable."

"Oh, I know her a little. I've spoken to her. Why, Ruth, the most *unlikely* people wrote to me. People I'd never *heard* of. There was one queer old man who said they'd met out along the river fishing for tadpoles or specimens of some kind, insects. Practically illiterate. She could have written. I thought it was strange." Lisa brooded at the house and its glittering windows. It was in a delicate mansard style, with fluted pilasters and fragile

iron lace. The last spidery vines stirred on its walls like paper streamers. The whole house had a light and partyish air. "I think it's heartless," she said.

Ruth picked up her gloves from the table, smoothing them, running them through her hand, laying them neatly but absently on her pocketbook. She's leaving me, thought Lisa, she's almost gone.

Ruth asked in a cajoling voice, "Why don't you ring Marilla and say you'll be over after all? You were fond of her."

"Yes, I could go. But I won't. She will talk about her son. She thinks he's wonderful. And really he is quite ordinary, anyone would say so." (She's silly about that perfectly ordinary boy. It's not fair, she said to herself.)

"But you and she ought to feel very close. It isn't very long since her father died."

"Yes," said Lisa, "I know. But it isn't the same thing at all. I felt terribly sorry for her, I really did, but it's quite different. He was old. Why, they *expected* it. Listen! That can't be your taxi so soon. Oh. It's for that house. I was right, it is a party. It's dressed up people. You know, I wonder about her. Is there a husband somewhere do you suppose, or just the daughter?" She peered through the window, disconsolately, like a little girl left out.

"You might make friends with her," said Ruth. "It might be good for you to have new friends."

Lisa brightened. "She's very attractive, I think. Don't you think she's attractive? I used to watch her in the garden, sunning herself. She is a splendid brassy color all over. She's older than me I should think. With a grown daughter she must be older. Oh, Ruth, I wish I could get interested in something again . . . I could do over the house . . ." She looked around the room in momentary quickening.

"That would be fine," said Ruth. "Why don't you?"

"Nothing seems worthwhile."

"That must be the taxi," said Ruth, gathering her things. But Lisa burrowed in her arms and would not let her go.

"Don't go. Don't go."

She felt the kind hand on her hair. "You know I must."

"Stay with me. I love you."

"I love you too, my darling."

"Then don't leave me."

"I must go back to my family."

There. It was said. The tears stilled in Lisa's eyes. She withdrew herself slowly from the arms that held her. "Oh, yes," she said. "Your children."

When Ruth was gone she didn't know what to do. She ranged through the silent house, the changed house. It had been changing gradually all morning preparing for the time when she would be alone. It stood still, secret, stood emptied. There was no sound, no hand-turned clock, even, to give the house a heart.

She said aloud, "I wish Will were here. . . . I wish he didn't have to work all the time, always squeezing minutes out . . ."

She ran upstairs to Ruth's room, to catch a last feeling of Ruth. But there was nothing, no presence, no sound but her own strained breathing. It was simply the guest room again. Slowly she turned away, but she had to pass the boy's room. She stood in the doorway, leaning against the side, seeing, under the present bare and makeshift arrangement, the cluttered boy's room of the past. It was as though she were looking at a double exposure, two photographs in one. Here, after school, she would find him sitting when she came home, bent over his beetles, or his insects or whatever it was, so industrious. Here he would pore over the books of the naturalist, the solitary secret life he had, such a secretive boy he had grown in the last years, watching her comings and goings in silence, waiting patiently for her to finish telephoning, one never knew what he was thinking. . . . Now . . .

Her aching mind followed him backward down his years. How charming he had been as a little fellow, before the gap-tooth stage, before the new teeth grew in, so enormous, like a horse, poor boy, before he was chin high to her. Each year of him was marked in inches on this wall, there, Will had forgotten to rub *that* out, each inch each year a year of her own life, creeping up the wall. The smaller boy, the little boy, walked before her down her mind, trudging off to summer camp, to nursery school, to a neighbor's down the street. Backward, backward, she saw him kneeling in his crib, clutching the slats with both his hands, his face pressed in between. . . . Give mother a quick kiss now, careful, c-a-r-e-f-u-l. "Such a dear little thing," she said aloud. "All that hideous suffering when he was born . . . I would have gone through it again."

She shivered now, looking at the desolate room, at Will's hasty efforts at disguise, a table, a chair, rag rug, bookcase, a couple of pictures on the wall. For the first time she noticed the pictures. She remembered them, Will's El Grecos, the leavings of his college days. But why had he put them here? She saw the unearthly shades, leaden, saffron, mauve, the tortured hues and lines and planes of human misery, and she fled. She rushed downstairs where the telephone started shrilling.

"Yes?" she said. "Yes? Yes? Yes?" But there was no one, not even a wrong number. Beside it she waited trembling, her nerves leaping for its jangle. She couldn't stand it any longer. She stabbed her fingers into the holes of the dial. "Will," she said breathlessly, "did you ring? No. Nothing. Ruth's gone. I just wondered . . ."

She let the receiver weigh down her hand. She heard the diminished voice, the little metal voice running on; it trickled out like grains from the egg-glass, downwards to the carpet as the receiver wilted.

"I'm all right. Please don't worry, Will. I'll be quite all right." Her voice trembled and steadied, his went on urgently, she had to smile at it, wanly, shaking her head at his worrying, scolding it. She replaced the receiver gently.

She didn't know what to do. Forlornly she leaned against the window. Even the outside world was changed. Under the bared trees, paths and curbs and lawns were lost under the russet matting. The neighborhood had lost its demarcation lines. The houses seemed standing in a forest, and the birds skimmed, between the branches.

"It's strange she never took any notice," said Lisa aloud. The house looked quite unreal, a confection out of a fairy tale. Just a card, a telephone call, the merest, most perfunctory note. But nothing.

Suddenly she thought that they might have been away and never known. She tried to think back the two months but she absolutely could not remember. She thought, however, that the woman might not have known.

And she wanted a friend, a friend who had no part with her past, no son for a reminder, but only a daughter. She thought of how it would be to have a daughter, of adopting a daughter, a small young daughter sleeping in a crib, sweet-smelling, ribbons, and philippine embroidery, little fine hair curling

like little fine feathers. She remembered her own dolls put away in the attic. It must be wonderful to have a daughter, a young, young daughter to begin young with, again.

Impulsively, before she repented, she slipped out of the house, and flew across the road, over the dead leaves, up the steps of the verandah, knocking at the glass door. And even as she knocked, seeing her face reflected dimly in the polished glass, and her hand withdrawing in horrified remembrance from the gleaming knocker, she thought, 'the party!'

The door opened.

It was as though the woman had been blown along the passage by the billows of talk and laughter, the tinkling, purling, rippling of girls' voices, like peals of bells, like humming-tops.

Lisa saw her dressed as a woman of fashion, in high satin, with an orchid at her throat, with make-up, and long dancing earrings. An unreal woman. She had opened the door on a smile, for some latecoming guest. Lisa saw the smile change and the pencilled eyebrows rise in query.

She said, "I live just over the way . . ."

"Why yes of course, Mrs. Er . . . of course, I know. How nice." She waited pleasantly, asking why with her smiling lips, her forehead, her hand, just patiently, on the door.

"You are having a party," said Lisa humbly. "I'll come again."

"An engagement party," cried the woman. "What do you think, my daughter got herself engaged. So very young, it's quite absurd. But what can I say? I did the same, and they are so happy."

Lisa looked at the delicious golden woman, and suddenly she could not bear it. "I thought perhaps you did not know. My son is dead."

She saw from the woman's face that only now had she really been identified, singled out from all the others. The woman *had* known. She feels embarrassed, thought Lisa with some kind of satisfaction, because she did not write.

"Yes, of course," said the woman, "it was very sad and dreadful. But surely . . . I mean, surely it was a little time ago . . ."

"It was two months ago today," said Lisa, against the merit of the party. She was going to cry. "It was only two months ago."

"It was quite dreadful for you. I am so sorry. But you see . . . You mustn't let yourself think about it now or you will make yourself ill. Why don't you go home and have a nice rest, and tomorrow, perhaps, we can have a good talk. You see how it is now, with this engagement party."

Yes, she must go away, before she began to cry. She tried to think of the right words that would take her away.

But young voices, detaching themselves from the babble of the party, were coming along the corridor, and two bright faces came to look at her behind the woman's shoulder.

"Who is it, mother?"

"Why don't we ask you in?"

"Why don't we ask you in to have some cake?"

But the mother was saying quickly, "Oh, she hasn't time. Be good children and bring her a nice piece of cake. And wrap it, please."

"With some of the little wedding bells?"

"So she can put it under her pillow and dream?"

"Yes, yes." The mother's voice swept them down the passage. "Now," she said to Lisa, "please go. Please. Before they come back. You wouldn't want to spoil their special day."

She smiled at Lisa, hurrying her.

Lisa fled.

She fled from the gingerbread house, through the forest of fallen leaves. Before she could wrench open her own door and fling herself inside, she saw that the white cat had come back, like a magician's trick up through a trap-door. It was lying hunched, its gaze long and indifferent. It yawned once, baring its needled teeth, then returned to absolute stillness. Behind it the glass door was shut and bland.

"Richard," she said, crying, "Richard."

There was a roaring in her ears. She saw the drowned boy as she had never had to see him, limp and dripping in his father's arms, his wagging limbs still trailing the desperate weeds, ghastly like El Greco. The pitifulness of this solitary ending. The last unanswered cry. The stillness. And the father, carrying his child, and stumbling towards her in her party dress.

Whimpering, she groped for the numbers in the telephone dial, to call to Will, to call for help.

MARGARET HUNTER JOHNSON

The Kid

Have you ever spent an afternoon in a bar? I don't mean early afternoon because most bars aren't even awake that time of day. It's later on that I'm talking about when the bar is just rubbing the sleep out of its eyes, and you can just sit and look around all by yourself. There's something different about the afternoon atmosphere, something that kind of lulls you and pushes your heavier thoughts away in a dark corner.

The nicest part about it is that you never know when something exciting is going to be born with you in the background, or a picture in human nature painted with you as the gallery. Two afternoons ago, I was sitting in the tavern across the street. It's a quiet little place with a long bar that curves out instead of lying straight from end to end. The bartender over there is a pretty particular guy. I can tell that by the way he polishes the glasses. That's something I always look for first. If he just wipes a glass a couple of times, briefly examines the results, then sets it down, I can bet he isn't first rate. But if he really works with it, looking it over four or five times between wipes, and, after rubbing and polishing till it glints and sparkles as it never did before, reluctantly sets it on the shelf, then he's tops in my book.

As I said, the bartender over there is one of the particular type. He's a clean-looking Irishman; wears a fresh shirt every day and keeps his black hair in place with a fragrant, barber-shop bay rum. He was giving a martini glass the third degree that afternoon, and I was perched on a stool enjoying every maneuver of his attack. A chrome faucet was squirting water into a metal sink, making a sound like rain on a tin roof. Everything was there. Battered, yellow cuspidors squatted close to the bar rail. Tables sporting bright checkered cloths stood idly in one corner of the room. There were soft red, overhead lights, the bar mirror multiplying the collection of glasses and bottles sitting in front of it, a big painting of a bare-knuckle prize fight and the tavern's subtle, alcoholic breath. Everything was there.

For finishing touches, the bartender held the glass close to his mouth and gave a short "huff," ignoring his sworn sanitary code. The glass steamed up for a moment. He wiped quickly and set it down. As he reached for the last glass he gave the faucet handle a flip. The rain stopped. I turned to the bottle in front of me. A coat of small, watery beads clung to it. I

turned it upside down and let big slugs of pale, brown liquor plunge into my glass. I stopped pouring just in time and watched the froth climb up and over the rim and felt it spill over my fingers. The foam was soft and creamy and smelled like wash soap. Maybe that's why they call it suds. Sitting there watching the beer perform in its cage was soothing. I heard the bartender yell for somebody in the backroom. Looking up I saw a mealy looking kid step out. He needed a haircut and a change of clothes. He looked at the bartender, nodded, and disappeared in the storeroom. Boxes scraped the floor, and the kid came out, dragging three cases of beer stacked one on the other. Stopping at the bar gate, he lifted the cases one at a time and carried them to the other end. His arms looked strained and taut as he lugged each case, but the way he thrust out his lower jaw made up for his lack of muscle. After setting the last case down he must have wanted to stand there and catch his breath, but instead he walked jauntily back to the storeroom.

The front door rattled open, bringing in a small cloud of cold air and a red-faced Swede.

"How's the kid, Mike?" he asked the bartender.

The cloud of cold air overtook me and left its chill for a moment.

"Doin' O.K.," he replied, reaching under the bar for a bottle and a shot glass, sliding them down. They took the curve on two wheels. The Swede poured and inhaled the whiskey and poured again. He picked up the dice jar, cupped his hand over the end, and shook. The dice made a hollow sound against the leather, then splattered over the hard top of the bar. Double sixes. The Swede grinned, shrugged his shoulders, and flipped a wrinkled bill to Mike. Then he turned to the pinball machine and slid in a nickel. As the balls rolled around, he operated like a veteran, nudging it gently, coaxing and talking to it. The machine responded with bells and blinking lights. The last ball sank in the bonus hole, and a splash of reds, yellows and blues ran over the backboard, making it look like a Fourth of July celebration. Smiling, he walked back to the bar and finished his second drink. Bringing the glass down with a rap, he made a satisfied sound with his mouth. The door rattled.

"See ya, Mike!" And he was gone.

A puff of winter air made advances on me. The kid shuffled out of the storeroom pushing a long-handled broom. He was sweeping under the stools, so I unwound my legs and waited for him. He worked hard; when he gathered the broom for a stroke his shoulder blades threatened his shirt with their thin

edges. His spine showed through like a string of big beads. The door opened and a woman walked in.

"Lord, it's cold! Ain't it, Mike?"

She jerked the scarf from around her head and shook her head. Her gift of cold air trapped the kid and I saw him shiver. The woman angled her head toward the kid and looked at the bartender with her eyebrows raised like a question mark. He answered by holding up his hand and making a circle with his thumb and forefinger. She smiled, headed toward the door labeled "Queens," and went in. Dime store perfume followed her.

The kid finished sweeping and went to the back room. I took a swallow of beer. It had lost its sting and was getting warm, so I pushed it aside. The door opened once more. It was the man that ran the news stand on the corner. Cold air whispered past me. The old fellow wore a black cap pulled snug over his ears and a pair of muffs over that, and a scarf tied the whole outfit down. His nose hooked out and was red and sore looking. The papers exhaled more cold air as he flopped them down on the bar. He took off his mittens and blew on his hands.

"Warm enough for ya, Michael?" he joked, wiping his nose on his coat sleeve. His voice was high pitched and broken. "How many you want tonight?"

"Better give me three, Joe."

"And one for me," I said.

I spread the paper out on the bar. It was still cold and the smell of winter air was in its pages. The left-hand column caught my eye.

SEARCH CONTINUES FOR YOUTH

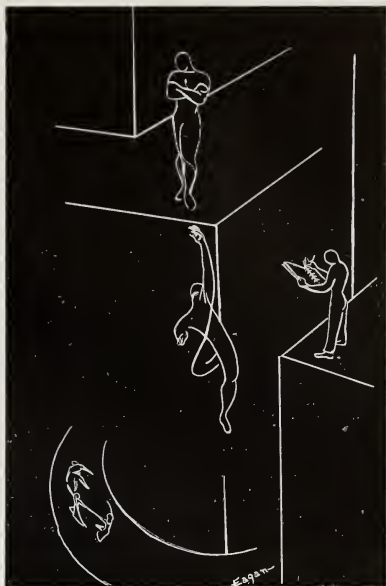
The thirteen-year-old youth who escaped from the St. Charles School for Delinquent Boys last week has not been found. Police Commissioner Edward Reagan promised an exhaustive search for the fugitive who . . .

I tucked the paper under my arm and dropped a half dollar on the bar. It rolled around and then shimmied on its side. My watch said 5:15 p.m. Time to go. I walked to the door, then turned around. "How's the kid?" I asked.

The bartender raised his eyebrows and frowned, hesitated, then lowered them and smiled. "He's comin' right along, comin' right along!"

DAN HOOTEN

Alone Is Hurt Too



I want to say about my friend.

They tell that I'm a dummy and I don't remember anything. But I want to say about my friend. I remember him, and how he smiled, and we played, and how I used to watch him. And now I cry. At nights when they go out and they leave me with the nurse, I cry. I cry low so she don't hear. And it's sad when I have to cry low. Someday I think I will cry loud so she will hear me and ask, what's the matter, Ronny? Maybe they should know that I cry. But I want to say about my friend.

I remember, I got nothing else to think about so I remember. Only they don't know I remember. They think I'm all grey inside and I don't remember. When they take me to the place where the blocks are and tell, fix them nice, Ronny, and then the man sits across the table and watches me, I remember even then.

He's a doctor. They tell that he's a friend. But he's a doctor.

I remember. And I could fix the blocks if I wanted. I bet I could. They think I'm all grey inside but I remember. And that's why I cry. And that's why I want to say about my friend.

He's dead. I killed him. But when I say about him, he's

not dead and I feel like I used to when it was a year, and I was a little boy.

A year is when trees get green and it rains every day. A year is when grass is. And that was the time when if I stood on my toes I could see my face in the mirror where the toilet is. And the time it stopped raining and my mother told, Ronny, I'll take you to the park where the big school is, and you can watch the boys play. And I held her hand when I crossed streets and I knew it was a year because it was warm, and everything was green and I saw the robin bird and I wanted to catch it and take it to my room but she told no, it was a year for the robin bird too and he must stay outside and fly. And I laughed because it was a year and there was no snow. Snow is cold, and it is wet, and it hurts you when you fall down in it with your face and you cannot get up until the nurse comes and picks you up, and tells that you are bad for falling down in the snow. And we came to the big school where the boys are and my mother told that they were playing ball and I should watch, and I told that I could play too and she told no, but I ran over to them and I told how I could throw the ball high up. And they gave it to me and I didn't hurt myself and I threw it, but it just went up a little and fell in front of my feet. And when I bent down to pick it up one of them pushed me, and I fell and they all laughed and told that I threw like a girl. And they laughed and I told them I wasn't a girl; I could see myself in the mirror where the toilet is. And my mother came and told that they were bad, and they laughed. I cried. And she took me out and told that they were bad and I cried some more because they threw high. And I didn't want to go, but my mother told I must, and I wanted to come back tomorrow, and she told the nurse could take me. And she was crying and I told she shouldn't cry because it was a year and it was warm again.

And the nurse took me to the place where the big school is and she was a good nurse because she told, Ronny, you stay here and play and don't go away, and I'll be back to get you later, and she told that I mustn't say to my mother and I should promise, and I did, and she shook me hard and told that if I broke my promise I should die. And her eyes looked funny, and her face like it wasn't a face, and I cried and she told I must promise and I promised.

Alone is like going to the man they tell is a friend but who's a doctor.

I sat on the bench and I didn't move. And there was a boy who had a nice face and who was throwing a ball up in the air

and running under it and trying to catch it. Only most of the time he didn't catch it but I didn't laugh, and I was happy when he did catch it like it was me that was catching it. And he saw me sitting on the bench and he stopped and looked at me, and he smiled and told that I should come over to him. But I didn't move. And he walked over and told that his name was Stanley and what's mine.

But I didn't move.

And he gave me the ball and told that I should throw it up and catch it. And he smiled. And he told that he would play with me.

At nights when it's dark and the moon makes my room quiet and I can see that it's beautiful and that I'm beautiful, I cry because they don't understand and think that I'm all grey inside. And I remember what he was like, and the words we told, and how he didn't laugh but only because he was happy and not that I was funny. And I think about the words and what it was like to hear them.

I want to say about the words.

—Do you go to this school?—

—No—

—Where do you go?—

And I didn't go to any school but if I told he would laugh, but I said about not going to school anyway. But he didn't laugh.

—I wish I didn't have to go to any school.—

—Do you go to the bigschool?—

—Yes. Got any trading cards?—

—What?—

—Trading cards. I've got Babe Ruth and Man of War. What have you got?—

—I don't have any.—

And he told, oh. And I was afraid he'd go away. I said a lie.

—Babe Ruth's a cousin.—

—Yeah?—

—Yes, he's a cousin. I could show you.—

—Gee.—

And we played and he was a friend, he told he was a friend. A friend is good to have. And I would be a friend too so he wouldn't have to throw the ball by himself.

And the nurse came, and he said I had a pretty mother and the nurse laughed and I hugged her, and she laughed, and Stanley laughed, and I laughed. And he told where he lived

and if I lived there and the nurse told, no, and, come Ronny, let's go. And I told I would be back and if he would. He told yes, he liked me, and he would be my friend and if he washed could I show him my cousin Babe Ruth.

And I saw him tomorrow. And lots of times. And the nurse let us cross streets alone, and he said he was glad we were big so we could cross streets. And we played, and it was the best a year ever was. And we went to where the water is, and the grass, and where the sky is blue, and he told that it was the ocean and I told no, I saw the ocean and it was big, and he told yeah, and it wasn't a lie because I saw the ocean and it was big and deep. And I told that this was more pretty than the ocean, and he smiled and was happy. And the time when he caught the frog but didn't hurt it, but put it in a box that had holes. And he caught it but let me take it home with me, and my mother told no, and when it was dark I put the frog in another box that had no holes so he could sleep. And then I took him to Stanley, and he was still asleep, and Stanley cried because he said it was dead. And I had never seen dead before, but it was like when you fall down in the snow with your face and you can't move, and the frog was afraid, and I cried when I saw dead, and he told never mind, he'll catch a new one. But I cried because the frog was afraid.

And I remember how it was, and I cry because they don't know I remember. And they used to tell sometimes when it was a year a long time ago, where's your friend, Ronny? Why doesn't he come over anymore? And I can't tell that I made him dead so I put my hands over my ears and pretend I don't hear. And when they tell, what's the matter, Ronny? I run and hide in the closet where it's dark and I stay still, and I hear my heart go jumping and it's dark in the closet, and I try to get out but there is no door, and I cry. And it's hot like the box with no holes, and I will die but they hear and come for me and look very sad when I do it, and I cry because I make them sad. I make everyone sad.

But I remember what it was, and how we played and the laughing, that was good, and how he was my friend and I didn't make him sad.

There was a once when I saw him in the place where the bigschool was. And it was a bad time, and I remember how it was. The nurse told that I shouldn't go away like always. And I waited for my friend but he didn't come, and there were some boys across the place that were hitting and they were bad

boys and I wanted to run. But my friend wasn't there and I would miss him. So I waited and the bad boys were still hitting but I didn't look. And I heard his sound, my friend's, and it was from where the boys were hitting. And I went over and it was my friend getting hit. And I told, stop, but they laughed and told I was a dummy. And they pushed me, and I told, stop, and they told they were going to fix me. And my tears burned like the snow, and I couldn't move. I tried from the inside, but I was like the closet, and my inside was Ronny, and I was trying to push out like through my skin. But I couldn't move. And they told I was a dummy and then they held me too. And a boy came. And he told we'll hold; kick them Newman. And he had hard feet, and they moved like on a toy, and when he kicked he fell down and everyone laughed, and they picked him up and told him to kick again, and his legs were hard like they weren't really legs, and they had metal on them and the boys told that they were wood, and he kicked with his dead legs, and he fell and they picked him up and he kicked and everyone laughed, and my friend cried and I wanted to, but I couldn't. My chest had ice in it. And everything was fuzzy, and I got all grey inside and . . . I don't remember but I was all grey inside. And I couldn't cry, and they were all laughing loud, and telling things like that I was a dummy and my friend was a dummy. But he wasn't. He wasn't. . . .

They went away.

And my friend was lying on the ground like a dog sleeping in a picture I saw once. And his body moved under his jacket like his heart was trying to jump out and I went to him and turned him over and there were little bits of stones in his face and there was blood coming out of his skin and I had them too and I showed him I had them, and I told that they were bad and that he should get up. And then he told the words like he was my mother and I don't fix the blocks.

—Ronny, what's the matter with you? Why do they make fun of you? Why do they hit me when I play with you?—

—They're bad. Let's go and catch a frog.—

—No. I'm going home. I hurt. I'm going home. I hurt.—

And he got up and he went away. He didn't tell I should come.

Alone is like going to the man they tell is a friend but who's a doctor.

And if your mother looks sad because you don't fix the blocks it's because alone is hurt too. And I want to show him

that they fixed me too. But he didn't look. And I looked at his but he couldn't see mine. Why is that, I wonder.

The dark is where you remember so it isn't dark.

And I remember. And I cry, but mostly I remember. To feel is to think but not to remember until it is dark so you can feel and so it isn't dark. And it mixes you up and it makes you fuzzy but you must do it because there is nothing else. And it's there, even more than the bed or the wet pillow you feel against your cheek where the spit is. And I can understand that and then I am like the others who can fix the blocks, but they never see. And it's because you hurt alone. And I can understand why my friend went home. But they can't see that I understand, and that is how I hurt alone.

And it was still a year and sometimes we played.

The grass was green every day and it wasn't new. And it was warm every day and that wasn't new. And I could see myself in the mirror where the toilet is without standing on my toes . . . but I didn't look.

And sometimes we played, and he laughed sometimes and I would watch him. That was always like when it was a year for the first time. But when the nurse told that it was time to go, I would tell I would see him tomorrow, but he would tell no sometimes, his mother wanted him to stay in. And tomorrow, I would see him from my house where the window is, and I wasn't sure but the boy with him walked like a toy that you wind up. . . .

And once it rained and I was inside and I was remembering in the room where the train was. And it went off the road and I called the nurse to put it on, and the door opened and it wasn't the nurse it was my friend and he told that the train was off the road and I should put it on. And I was afraid because I couldn't put it on. And I told that my eyes hurt and I couldn't see to put it on. And he looked at me funny and he said the words I think about and remember most.

—Put the train on.—

—No, my eyes hurt and my fingers are stiff. Let's play with the block game.—

—That's a baby game. Put the train on.—

—No. My eyes . . . —

—Put it on. You can't put it on. You don't know how.—

—I do.—

—Then put it on. Put the train on.—

—I got a new game you never saw.—

—You can't put it on. You can't.—

—I can.—

—Then put it on. Put the train on.—

And he was laughing, but not because he was happy and I didn't watch him. And I kneeled down and picked the train up. It was heavy. And I touched the wheels and tried to make them go on the road that was made out of wires. And the wheels were cold. And I was on my stomach and the wheels were cold and they burned like the snow does. And I couldn't move myself. And he kept telling that I should put it on and I tried to move but it was like I was the closet again and the inside of me was trying to push itself out.

—Put the train on.—And his sound was loud like it was a song and it made me afraid and I cried and the nurse heard and came in and picked me up and he laughed. And he told that he had to go away.

Ashamed is a hurt too, and people see it and know that it is a hurt. And that time when it was a year and I could see myself in the mirror where the toilet is, I cried and felt ashamed. And I told the nurse if I would see him again, but she just looked and told, you do such silly things, Ronny.

And when it was dark and they couldn't hear, I cried without remembering, without going over why, I cried, and it was sad I did silly things. And I know I must try hard not to do silly things anymore.

I remember. They think I'm all grey inside but I remember. I remember what it was like in the room where the train was and how when they weren't there, I would pick it up. And it would make my fingers cold, but I hold onto it, and tried to put it on the wires. And I would get some of the round things on the wires and then I would just touch it a little bit and it fell off. And I did it a lot of days so I could put the train on and it wouldn't fall off. And one time I called the nurse in, and I showed her and she smiled and told that it was very nice, Ronny. And it was very nice. And I didn't do silly things anymore. I felt about it a lot. On nights when they thought I was asleep I felt about it and how I could make Stanley see that I was like the others who could fix the blocks, and how I could put on the train. If he would see, he would know that it was all right to be my friend.

Alone is a friend too sometimes. It is when there is no other way of being you, like looking in the mirror where the toilet is so you can be sure you are really there. And I knew that I must do something nice so he would know that it was all right to be my friend.

I remember. They don't know and I cry low so they don't hear, but I remember.

I remember how it was that time when the nurse took me to the place where the bigschool was, and it wasn't any fun because he wasn't there, and she told that she must do something, and that I should stay and not go away, and that if I was good she would give me some chocolate candy.

Chocolate candy is good and you eat it after supper, and it is better than supper because you only have it sometimes. And she went away, and I was good.

I remember. And how she didn't lie and gave me the candy, and I told that I would eat it later.

And it was dark. And I didn't remember about the candy and I got out of bed and I walked over to the place where the chocolate candy was and I ate a piece of it. And it was good, and the best chocolate candy ever. And I made a wish that Stanley could have such good chocolate candy and then I thought about giving to him, and giving it to him.

It was dark, but not like in the room where the moonlight makes things quiet. And I didn't know the buildings and they were like black walls, and no way over. And I was afraid and the dark was not for remembering, but for getting by the walls and to the place where Stanley lived.

There was a something on the sidewalk that made me fall, it wasn't that I walked silly. And I was on the ground and I didn't know if I could get up without calling the nurse and I tried to but I couldn't and I thought about how I was silly again and I must get up. And my face was on the sidewalk and the little stones rubbed into my face, and my mouth was open, and the sidewalk was dirty, and I could taste that it was dirty. And then I saw that the chocolate candy had pushed itself out of my hand and I had to get it. And when I got it I was standing up and I didn't know how I did it. It was dirty, but not very, and I rubbed some of it off, and I walked on until it was Stanley's house.

And I didn't know which was his bell and I pushed them all and they all started ringing and it was a pretty sound and I opened the door and a lady on the place where the first floor was told what did I want, and was I lost; and I told, where's Stanley, and she told upstairs and closed the door. And I was upstairs and the chocolate was in my hand. And it was Stanley's father.

—I brought Stanley a present.—

—It's one o'clock.—

—I brought Stanley a present.—

—What's the matter with you? It's one o'clock.—

—He's my friend. I brought him a present.—

—Stanley's in bed. It's one o'clock.—

—I must give it to him so he'll see I do nice things. Stanley, STANLEY; it's Ronny. I brought you a present.—

And Stanley came out in his pajamas and he was surprised to see me, and his father told, do you know this boy? And he told yes. He knew me. I was his friend. And I hold out my hand to give him the chocolate candy, but I was holding it tight and it was all loose and melted but it was still good.

—I brought you a present, Stanley.—

—What?—

—I brought you some chocolate candy. It's a present because you're my friend.—

And he looked at me funny because he was glad I brought it for him. I didn't tell that it was a little dirty. And he didn't take it because maybe he was ashamed he didn't have anything for me. But his father took it from me and gave it to him, and Stanley told thank you like he was thinking about something. And I told if he would eat it now, and his father told me, in the morning, and goodnight.

—Will you be at the place where the bigschool is tomorrow so we can play?—

And he laughed.

And his father told that he would be there, and goodnight. I went home.

And it's dark and the moonlight makes my room quiet, and I remember. They don't know I remember. They think I'm all grey inside and I don't remember. When they take me to the place where the blocks are and tell, fix them nice, Ronny, I remember even then.

I remember how it was about my friend, and how he smiled, and we played, and how I used to watch him.

He's dead. I killed him. He didn't come to the place where the bigschool is, and it was because the chocolate was dirty and I made him dead when he ate it. I didn't mean to, because he was my friend.

And now I cry. At nights when they go out and they leave me with the nurse, I cry. I cry low so she don't hear. And it's sad when I have to cry low.

Someday I think I will cry loud so she will hear me and ask, what's the matter, Ronny?

STANLEY ELKIN

Phillip

Phillip almost found it that day
In the grey mist, in the stillness
That shrouded the Church and the valley.
It almost came to him
That evening in the summer
At the Youth for Christ meeting
While he stared at Landee
In the light of the stars
And the bonfire.
He felt it in a dreadful sense
At Landee's grave in the winter,
That day the people buried her,
But the wind and snow were blowing,
And it didn't speak to him,
And he couldn't touch it.
It filled his room that night
Before he wrote the poem to her,
And he could feel it smile and speak
But couldn't see nor hear it.
According to the preacher,
He should have thought it God
What he had felt about him
At those times.
But it could not be found
In a word or idea,
It could not be learned
From the Church or the preacher,
It could not be realized
By the people in worship.
But Landee knew,
And he was soon to know.

R. L. BRENNAN

Poem by Phillip

Cold as winter when it flies,
Cold as wings in icy skies,
Cold is Landee where she lies
Below the snow . . . below.

Warm as summer was her face,
Soft as sun on curtain lace,
Then a love brought death, disgrace;
And she lies 'neath the snow.

Winter stars, so cold to see,
Pierce the night that's haunting me.
Thoughts of Landee taunting me
Are fierce as stars and snow.

From the West the snow now flies,
In the graveyard Landee lies,
Cold as wings in icy skies,
Below the snow . . . below.

by Phillip S.

R. L. BRENNAN

A New Life

The Jackson Park El moved slowly down the track toward the Wabash Avenue platform. People at the station crowded under the neon sign which announced the train's arrival. They pushed into the cars with shuttered eyes, each intent on his own problems. Heavy Italian women, tall young Negro men, tired faded blonde stenographers—all pushing to reach home, however dreary home might be. As the train slowly ground away from the station, the passengers fell into a semblance of order and sat on the slippery wicker seats or hung on the white plastic straps in momentary relaxation, as though they had reached a time-out in a long bout. Some looked at their wrists and shook their watches to be sure they hadn't stopped; some folded their hands and shut their eyes, too weary to feel unguarded; and others stared at the advertisements which lined the ceiling.

Henry Miller considered the picture of a family in front of a white cottage set in a very green yard. The family was smiling its security down to the cluttered car. The parents stood protectively behind the children, holding their small shoulders lightly with their hands. Henry glanced away and out the

dirty window where families were preparing for dinner in the flats above the street. The window reflected the light from within, and the increasing darkness made a double exposure of the images. As the car rumbled on, the outside lights slashed intermittently into the reflected interior. Henry's face was mirrored in the car window. His face was a little too pink, although his collar wasn't tight, and his light grey eyes were deep-set and a little watery. He was a stocky man in his middle forties with a paunch partially concealed by the neat grey flannel suit he was wearing. His hands were a little soft and pudgy, as though they couldn't do heavy work. The evening edition of the *Herald American* was tucked under his arm.

He examined his reflection in the window surreptitiously and tried to blot out the passing scene in order to see himself more distinctly. The picture of a settled businessman pleased him, and he bared his teeth in a slight smile at the window. He hadn't accepted offers to stop for a drink before going home, and he enjoyed the idea of sitting in the apartment after dinner, playing with the kids a while, reading and talking, and then going to bed early. He would tell Mae that things were going to be different, and the thought of it was good. Perhaps that cottage with a small down-payment would be worth thinking about . . . should be more room for the children to grow in, and a nice garden. Starting over again would be easier in a new place; he could make Mae realize that the past was all over, and she would stop bringing it up for every little thing. He opened the paper and looked at the headline, but his mind was still on the new life that he and Mae would lead. He could make good money and he'd turn it all over to his wife to handle. They'd save a little and maybe take a trip in the summer. He looked up from the paper and smiled at the thin grey-haired woman sitting across the aisle. She startled out of her thoughts and then shrugged her shoulders and looked away.

The train swung its way through the South Side, the cars were gradually cleared, and now all the remaining passengers had seats. By the time the El reached Kenwood avenue, it was almost empty and Henry Miller walked to the front of the car and stood waiting for the heavy door to open. Once out on the platform the passengers started quickly down the stairs; they made a patterned sound on the wooden treads. As he walked to the stairs Henry almost collided with a tall, thin man coming toward him. Both Henry and the tall, thin man stepped to one side and then the other, each gesturing and smiling that the other should have the right of way. Finally the

tall man stopped looking at Henry's feet and a surprised smile of recognition crossed his face.

"Hank, you old son of a gun!" He stopped his dancing and held out his hand. "I'll be damned . . . it's been five years . . . that night at the 22 Club when Mae got so mad . . ." He stopped and made a slightly embarrassed gesture with his hand, and then recovered his composure. "Jim said he saw you the other night. . . . I was going to look you up before I left town again."

"Good to see you, Bill." Henry stepped out of the way of a woman going towards the stairs. "We're blocking traffic. . . . How about a drink. Little tavern right down the way."

The night was damp and muggy and soot seemed to hang suspended in the air. They crossed the street under the El. Artificial lights lit up the stores along 63rd, a jeweler's bright display reflected the blue neon sign of the small tavern they entered.

The bartender wiped the counter off and stood expectantly. "I'll have a beer," Henry said. He turned to Bill and offered an explanation. "I'm on the wagon these days . . . been overdoin' it . . . don't feel as good as I could." Bill nodded in understanding, as though he had heard it from a long distance. They sat drinking slowly and talking the life they had both known. The small town high school they had attended, the fraternity at college, and the free lancing in prohibition Chicago. They would sit watching their glasses for a moment, and then one of them would laugh and look up.

"Remember the night we got Ronnie what's-his-name drunk? He'd never had a drink before, and you cried in your beer the rest of the night because you said he had to write a paper for you the next day!"

"Sure, I wasn't going to get kicked out for a joke." He laughed. "Huh, Mother was sure proud of those papers . . . told people what a great student I was. . . . Mae found out about it after we were married and claimed it was a dirty trick to cheat my own mother." He chuckled and turned his glass around. "She never did understand how to handle Mother. I always did what would make her happy." They both shook their heads and drained their glasses. Henry looked around for the bartender, and then seemed to remember something. "Hey, why don't you come up to the apartment and see the people. You haven't got anything important? We'll buy some shrimp and fry it . . ." Henry paid for the beer, and they walked out into the night.

It had begun to rain in soft, misty drops, and the street

lights had halos around them. They walked across the street to a delicatessen and bought the shrimp and several other items. It was only a couple of blocks to the apartment and they picked up their bags and walked through the dampness. Their voices seemed to echo back to them in the haze, and they laughed a little less than before. The apartment building was of that dirty red brick that had had a vogue twenty-five years ago, and an electric light shaped like a lantern hung over the door. They pushed into the foyer, and Henry leaned against a buzzer.

"This isn't a bad building. . . . I was thinking tonight, though, that we ought to get a larger place . . . here, hold this bag a minute, Bill, something seems to be wrong with the buzzer . . . think I've got a key." Henry felt in his pocket and pulled out a key chain with several keys on it. He opened the door to the stair well and held it open for Bill. The elevator door stuck and when it finally closed after them they just missed catching their fingers in it. Henry pushed the button, and they slowly moved up to the third floor. Then they walked down a long hall to the door marked 313. The carpet in the hall was dark; it seemed to smell of many feet. In spots it had worn through to the wood, and Henry stumbled on one of these spots. He turned the handle of the door at Number 313, but it was shut, and the lock clicked in place as he pulled on it.

"Don't know how you're supposed to get in around here. All the doors locked. . . . Mae must have heard another prowler story or something." He pushed against the door with his elbow and made several ineffectual knocks.

"Here we go again," he said, as he handed Bill his package and brought out the keys once more. The door opened easily, and they entered a dark hall much like the one they had just been in. The light in the apartment was the reflection of passing cars on the wall. Henry flicked the switch. A light in the middle illuminated the living room starkly. A glass half full of water stood near a small ivy plant, and a newspaper, opened to the funny papers, lay on the floor. Henry opened a swinging door which exposed a small kitchenette; they put their bags on the table and Bill looked at Henry expectantly.

"Guess they've gone out . . . must be a note around here somewhere." He nodded toward the icebox. "There's beer in there. Why don't you open a couple of cans. . . . I'll take a look around for a note."

He wandered around the empty living room carefully, look-

ing behind the table in case the note had slipped off. Bill came in with two glasses.

"Must've gone to a late movie and haven't realized what time it is." He sat down on one of the cheaply slip-covered chairs and drank deeply.

Bill lit a cigarette and said, "Must've." The conversation did not pick up, and they sat in silence. Henry suggested that they make their own meal, and they went into the kitchen and fixed the shrimp. Henry laughed more than was his custom after two beers, but his eyes had a listening look. Every once in awhile he would touch Bill's arm, and they would both listen to steps in the hall, but the steps either stopped short or went on past the door. They bumped into each other often in the little kitchen, and the fat for the shrimp almost burned. When they had put the meal together they left part of it in the oven and sat down in the living room. The kitchen was cluttered with dishes, and they shut the doors on them.

Henry set his plate on the table and turned toward the bedroom door. "I'll just take a look at what clothes Mae wore . . . maybe they're downtown." He opened the door and turned the dressing table light on. The table stood empty under the light. Stale powder covered the top in a thin layer, and two bobby pins lay on it. Henry stood with his hand on the lamp switch. He didn't turn to the clothes closet, although his shoulder twitched in that direction. The light went out almost involuntarily, and he returned to the living room.

"Pretty good meal?" he asked, picking up his plate. "We haven't lost the old touch." His voice tried to assume the old raillery. Bill looked at him questioningly.

"I guess they're over at her sister's."

"Uh." Bill picked up the shrimp in his fingers and ate tail and all. Henry's eyes watered a little more, and he bit the shrimp meat off and put the tails back on his plate. The conversation was a little tense as they ate and drank another can of beer, and even Bill began to start at noises in the hall, but he didn't say anything more. The telephone rang suddenly, and they both jumped at the noise so much louder than the one they had been expecting. Henry set his plate on the table and jovially called, "Just a second" to the ringing phone.

"They've kept us waiting long enough, huh?"

He winked at Bill. The hallway was dark, and he brushed against the little table with the phone on it. He sat down on the bench and picked the receiver off the hook.

"Yeah?" His voice rose to a familiar question mark.

"Is Tony there?"

Henry picked up a pencil on the phone table and made little circles on the dark finish. "You must have the wrong number. This is Dorchester 63260."

"Oh," and the clicking on the other end of the line came in the middle of the "thanks."

"Wrong number," he said as he picked up the empty beer glass and tried to get a swallow from it.

"Yeah, I heard." Bill looked at the glass in his hand and finished it in a couple of gulps. "I got to be going . . . man about a dog, you know." He picked the last shrimp off his plate and chewed it carefully. The tail crunched loudly in the silence. "Sorry I couldn't see Mae again. Be sure to tell her hello for me, and thank her for the meal."

"Sure, well, they'll probably be home pretty soon. I'll call her sister and see if she's over there." Henry straightened up and slapped Bill on the shoulder in a hearty gesture. "We'll call you up sometime before you leave and have you over . . . got to see those boys of mine. What's your number?" He took a pad of paper from his pants pocket and wrote the number down. They walked to the door and stood there nervously for a moment.

"Well, I'll see you around," Bill finally said and stepped out in the hall, creasing his hat carefully as he walked.

Henry turned slowly from the door and walked to the telephone table. He picked up the receiver and then set it back on the cradle. His hand was shaking just a little. A door buzzer down the hall rang intermittently. The dirty plates and empty beer cans lay on the couch, and he walked over and carried them into the kitchen. A fork tipped on the edge, and he managed to carry it as far as the sink before it clattered off the plate. The kitchen still smelled of grease, but the lard they had fried the shrimp in was hardening. Little pieces of batter floated in the center where it was still liquid. Henry glanced at the spot on the shelf where the electric clock stood. Now there was a dark mark on the shelf where it had been. The faucet was dripping slowly, and he turned the handle tightly. The drip diminished slightly, but it was still there. He turned the faucet on full pressure; the water splashed in the sink and splattered on his suit. He slowly turned it down and filled a glass. The water was cold and tasted strongly of chlorine.

Henry picked up the salt and pepper shakers and placed them over the spot where the clock had been. He poured the grease

into a can and put the can with the garbage, and rinsed a dish that was covered with grease and crumbs. He examined the surface of the wet dish for any particles of food and then set it down on the counter on top of the unrinsed dishes. His glance involuntarily returned to the salt and pepper shakers, and he turned from them and took a beer out of the icebox. He pushed the swinging kitchenette door off the door-stop and shut the cluttered kitchen from sight.

The evening paper that he had brought home with him was laying on the floor where it had fallen from the arm of the chair. He sat down and read an article on unusual weather in California. The light wasn't good, and he turned the table lamp around and adjusted his position. The hall had grown still and only an occasional footstep could be heard, but he stopped and listened to each one as if from habit. He shook his head when one of them almost stopped at the door and went on. "Should be home soon," he said to no one. The voice was strange in the quiet room, and Henry switched on the radio. A program of popular music blared forth, and he turned the sound down.

"This is your 11 o'clock dance music," a swinging voice announced. Henry appeared surprised. "Late," he said, again aloud. He folded the papers neatly and put them carefully in the magazine rack. He picked up the glass of water and looked at the ivy plant, then set the glass down. He turned toward the bedroom and opened the door. The room had a faint odor of handkerchief sachet, and the long light from the living room illuminated the dressing table, catching the dusty coat of powder on it. He took off his coat and laid it on the bed and undid his collar. His hand reached automatically for the lamp, but he stopped and pulled his collar off and sat down.

He put his hands in front of his face, sheltering his eyes from the unlit bedroom, but when he looked up they had adjusted to the dark and he saw the closet door with the shoe bag on it. There were only an old pair of his tennis shoes and his other brown oxfords. The bag tilted at an angle with the unbalanced weight.

He walked over to the dressing table and blew on the forgotten powder, and unlatched the window and pulled it wide. The damp mist sucked the sweet odor from the room.

Henry Miller undressed slowly and then he turned the lights out. He lay quietly in the darkness, but he was not listening for footsteps.

PATRICIA SIECK

The Grand Prize

Ben Farver has gone to California now. There have been a lot left for the same place, mostly people who didn't do very well here. They say they like the climate.

I met Ben in high school several years ago. I remember a strange thing about him, or rather it isn't strange at all; it was that he could never be really first-rate in anything he tried: there were always some or a few or even only one better in any subject or game. That's not bad, but he thought it was and maybe it amounts to the same thing.

He always worked around horses a good deal, and so must have got to thinking that riding a winner in the horse show would balance his other defeats. Anyhow, he bought an expensive horse—I mean expensive for him—two hundred and fifty dollars, about twice what he could afford. But it was a fine horse, about fifteen hands, compact, with solid bones and hoofs. He was an unusual color: red spots on white, and Ben gave him the fanciful name, Rain of Blood.

Ben trained the horse all summer. The event he wanted to enter is called an obstacle race; in this the horse is ridden through a narrow lane marked by kegs and jumped over a low obstacle. It is a simple course, made for amateur riders, but your horse wants speed and agility.

The horse show this year was early in September. Matthew and Conway—who were only entering for fun, not with any particular prize in view—took their horses by truck and I rode into town that afternoon. Ben was already there, working out his horse in an empty lot. The horse was jumping lightly and weaving through the kegs easily as a kitten. I decided not to enter the obstacle race.

That night Matthew and I drove to town with Conway and Jean, his wife. Bluefields was full of cars, all headed south of town for the horse show, which, as it did not allow entries from outside the county, was a local affair, and popular. When we got there a couple of floats, winners in the afternoon parade, were circling the ring in the glare of the floodlights.

Finally these things were driven away, and the show began, slowly, with long breaks for awarding prizes and announcing the sponsors of each class. After the two pony classes, the three-gaited saddle class, and the ungaited saddle class came the

obstacle race. "Grand" prize for this was a four-dollar trophy, five dollars cash, and a little glory.

The four entries came in and waited at the south end of the ring. The "ring" was a large rectangle with curved ends. The start at the south was marked by two oil flares, set a few feet apart and burning tirelessly with a yellow flame which only seemed to light its own smoke. The white kegs were along the curve at the north end. Halfway back down the other side, and centered before the main stands, was the jump; it was a bale of straw with a pole raised a little above.

Matthew and I walked out with Ben to talk until his turn came to ride. Ben and the horse were trembling like dynamos. He was not riding a saddle, but a surcingle, which is nothing but a wide cloth band with stirrups attached.

The loudspeaker bawled: "Number twelve, Lightfoot, owned and ridden by Ronald Durr."

This horse was well trained, and made a graceful jump, but he was slow. Rain of Blood danced with excitement.

"Better hold him back a little, 'specially before the jump," Matthew said. "You won't have any trouble winning."

"Yes," I said, "you've got speed to burn."

"I won't hold him back. By God, I'm going to win. You just watch, you're going to see something. Mac, you're just sore because my horse is faster than yours," Ben said to me.

I saw that Ben was in no mood to talk, and shut up. So did Matthew. However, Ben's girl, who was there also, and who, like many women, was entirely without tact, said:

"Do listen to what Matthew says, Ben. You can win."

"You shut up too. You all want me to lose."

Ben's girl looked puzzled. She was a nice little girl with wispy brown hair, and would make Ben or someone a good wife, especially during a depression.

"Number twenty-one, Rocket, owned and ridden by Homer Pennell," roared the loudspeaker.

Matthew came over to talk to me.

"Is Ben going to win?" he asked.

"I doubt it."

"Why? He's faster than anyone. You won't enter against him."

"He counts on winning too much—he's made a symbol or something out of this race. The thing to do is to expect as few things as possible—someone will win who doesn't give a damn."

"Number seven, Jack, ridden by Dick Rogers, owned by Eugene Leonard."

We turned to watch because this was the horse we supposed would give Ben the best competition. He jumped between the flares and pounded away, fogged along by this kid from Ferryville, down the river. However, on the turn the horse flicked a hoof on one of the kegs, sending it spinning. It would lower his chances.

Ben was next. Matthew and I walked over to the rope gate where the horses entered. Matthew got his horse and mounted.

"Be ready to get that rope down," he said.

"What's up?"

"If anything goes wrong I want to be able to stop that horse."

"Number eighteen, Rain of Blood, owned and ridden by Ben Farver."

Rain of Blood was dancing as they came up to the flares. The rider's face was strained, his lips set, his body stiff, his knuckles white with his grasp on the reins.

"Go!" said the starter.

Rain of Blood leaped between the flares. Ben let the reins go slack, and the horse ran so hard that the sound of his hoofs seemed continuous. He turned through the kegs—not touching one—and speeded up again as he came off the curve. Then they approached the jump, at a dead run. The horse had jumped a bale so many times in practice that he was overtrained and overconfident. This time he tripped over the bale and fell.

I threw the rope off the stake and felt Matthew's horse jump by me. Rain of Blood seemed to scarcely touch the ground before getting on his feet again, riderless, with the reins hanging loose and the surcingle twisted out of place. He turned and tried to run away with a kind of bounding hobble. He had a broken leg.

Ben was lying on the ground, motionless. Matthew, not getting off his horse, kept the crowd back for a few seconds until the doctor came from the audience.

"He's not hurt badly," the doctor said after another few moments.

Meanwhile a little group of three or four men had come up the ring, one of them carrying a rifle. They had stopped and were talking together uncertainly. Matthew rode to them and said something: they handed him the rifle willingly, and he

rode over to Rain of Blood, who had ceased trying to run and was standing quietly on three legs. Matthew rode up by him, the rifle moved in a short arc, and I saw the light flick out of the barrel and heard the report of the shot, not sounding loud, even in the silence. Rain of Blood staggered a few feet and fell down, while Matthew's frightened horse jumped to one side.

They carried Ben out at the north end of the ring where his girl and some friends were waiting, and Matthew trotted back down the ring, his horse's hoofs thudding in the dust. A truck drove in dragging a log chain to pull the dead horse away. It passed Matthew near the gate as he was handing the rifle back to its owner. This man was saying something to Matthew in a tone of jovial sympathy, but Matthew was not looking at him and did not appear to be listening.

I walked outside the ring to where Conway was sitting on his horse. Like a good many of the riders, he was wearing boots and a cowboy hat. This last he kept taking off, and in putting it back each time he would try to give it a more casual appearance.

"If you get it much more nonchalant," I said, "it will fall off."

"What do you mean?" Conway said.

"Why don't you go and win the grand prize?" I asked. "You can do it now."

"What for?" Conway said suspiciously.

"Get your name in the paper."

"You going to enter that damn Standard Bred?"

"No, I'm not. You get in there and win for our half of the county."

"By God, I think I'll do it." He jammed the hat on.

Matthew had taken his horse out of the ring, and now he came back on foot.

"Conway's decided to win the grand prize," I said.

"Well, I'll be damned," Matthew said. He turned his back and walked away.

"What's the matter with him?" Conway said.

"Maybe he wanted the grand prize," I said, seriously.

"Oh, well he can have it then. I don't care."

"No, he's leaving. Go on and win! You can show these river boys how to ride."

And that's how Conway came to win the grand prize, and why Ben Farver went to California.

HARRY PREBLE

August 9th, 1:30am

A sky of sequin-dust and faded black construction paper,
domed and mute,
spills daubs of luminous gold liquid
quenched in darkness before they touch horizon.
The disembodied chirping of crickets
echoes the intense dark of silence.
Free forms of hollow metal, glazed and dumb,
make their presence felt by the space they occupy
on cement and asphalt slope.
Leaves are crazy patterns, quiet, intermittent,
with yellow-white incandescence.
A solitary whistler passes with cleated heels;
night exhales, resumes its breathing.

J. R. ANDERSON

Concerning Contributors . . .

MARGARET HUNTER JOHNSON . . . first contribution to *Illini Writers*
. . . lived in New Zealand . . . studied in England . . . wife of U. I. pro-
fessor . . . audits various writing courses.

DAN HOOTEN . . . "The Kid" is his second story to be published in
this magazine.

STANLEY ELKIN . . . senior in L. A. S. majoring in American Lit.
. . . working on a novel this semester.

R. L. BRENNAN . . . his two poems are from a longer work, *The
Pine Tree Church* . . . "The Twins," which appeared in the last issue, was
the first of the group to be published . . . we hope to present other excerpts
soon.

PATRICIA SIECK . . . another first contribution . . . junior in L. A. S.
from Winnetka.

HARRY PREBLE . . . senior in L. A. S. . . . majoring in teacher train-
ing . . . from Pittsfield, Illinois . . . fiction-writing a hobby.

J. R. ANDERSON . . . graduate student in English . . . frequent con-
tributor to *Illini Writers*.

The editors of *Illini Writers* are planning a special May issue, which will include essays and reproductions of student art work as well as our usual poetry and short stories. We are still accepting contributions for this issue, and are especially interested in short poems and essays. Persons interested in submitting their work should do so at the English office, 204-A Lincoln Hall.

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